

BOOK OF THE WEEK

Roger Lewis

SIZE MATTERS NOT: THE EXTRAORDINARY LIFE AND CAREER OF WARWICK DAVIS
BY WARWICK DAVIS

(AURUM £16.99)

GEORGE Lucas has saluted Warwick Davis as 'an actor and as a human being' — as opposed to, say, an Ewok. For the sweet-faced 2ft 11in Davis was indeed an Ewok in *Return Of The Jedi*, and because 'the public response to the Ewoks was overwhelmingly positive', two spin-off specials were produced starring the cuddly creatures, *The Battle For Endor* and *Caravan Of Courage*.

Davis has also played a goblin called Bumpot in *Labyrinth*, a David Bowie vehicle conceived by Jim Henson of Muppet fame. He was Willow in the Val Kilmer film of the same name, another epic about good elves and evil trolls.

Dressed up as a talking mouse in a C.S. Lewis adaptation, Davis startled Tom Baker into intoning: 'All my life I have had difficulty in knowing whether I am awake or in a nightmare'. And in *Extras*, Ricky Gervais insisted on retaking the scene where Davis gets knocked unconscious a staggering 23 times.

The one film Davis has not been in is *Time Bandits*, though everyone compliments him on his performance. He shrugs this off good-humouredly. Indeed, Davis has a self-deprecating side to his personality that is very winning — he must be a joy to know.

He gets in first, for example, with all the jokes. He tells us about being short-listed for jobs, and how often he is left short-changed. His wedding was a 'small affair' and as regards writing this lively autobiography: 'It's not as if I'm short of material'.

NOR is he. There is tragedy here, as well as laughter. When Davis was born in 1970, the doctors were not sanguine. 'Your son will be wheelchair bound and dead by his teens, if he survives these first few months,' his father was told grimly.

As result of a rare genetic condition, Davis's bones stopped developing and he remembers that at school, 'once they were five years old, my classmates were already taller than I would ever be'. He never went much higher than 2ft 11in. 'Even for a little person, I was short.'

Throughout his childhood, he endured painful operations on his legs.

'The surgeons cut the back of my legs from my ankles to my knee and undid all the tendons', which were somehow re-laced, allowing him to stop walking on in-turned heels. But there is not one moment of self-pity with Warwick Davis. 'What I lacked in inches,' he says, 'I made up for in explosive energy.'

The only concessions his family made to his height were to put the light switches and a sink lower on the wall. Davis has never had any

difficulty driving fast cars. The invention of mobiles put an end to the inconvenience of not being able to reach up to the handset in phone booths. Other than that, the only menace to being a dwarf is Irish people. They insist on touching him

for luck, even chasing him around supermarkets or into lifts in hotels.

By the age of 11, Davis was a professional actor. He has been more fortunate than other diminutive colleagues. Jack Purvis, who was in *Time Bandits*, was run over by his

pedal car and died six years later. David Rappaport, another Terry Gilliam favourite, struggled with depression and killed himself in 1990.

Davis, by contrast, loves the trappings of fame, being recognised and attending sci-fi conventions to



The biggest little star in Hollywood



Size is no matter: Warwick Davis in his role as an Ewok and, above, without the fur

mingle with fans. When he flew First Class to Hollywood, however, the seat 'to me, was about the size of a four-poster bed'.

George Lucas cast him as Anakin Skywalker's childhood friend, Wald, in the revived Star Wars series, and Davis also played the full-length Yoda in long-shots. Under lots of make-up, he has had roles in all the Harry Potter films, most notably as Professor Filius Flitwick, who runs a levitation class.

DAVIS seems to have had most fun, however, in a series of low-budget horror pics about a psychopathic leprechaun. In one scene, he tells us, 'I cruelly crush the store owner's chest and stomach by hopping on him with a pogo stick'. Laurence Olivier never got to do that — you have to be a dwarf.

He was also part of a troupe of stripping dwarves, *The Half Monty*. 'We were fully booked for two years in advance,' he says proudly.

The highly-sexed aspect of little people is not, after all, a rumour. When they get together at panto rehearsals or on the set of another fantasy movie, they make up for lost time.

'It's not that often we get to see so many of each other in one place,' Davis says, reasonably. 'So things can get a little heated, shall we say.' Imagine what it must have been like when they shot *The Wizard Of Oz* in the Thirties — Munchkin heaven.

Davis is happily married, with two children who are 'wild, obnoxious, eat anything and are living life to the full'. If he counts his blessings, this is because Davis and his wife Sue lost their first two babies, who were born with underdeveloped lungs.

'There is nothing that can prepare you to face something like that,' he writes. 'Your arms ache with emptiness, with the impossible desire to hold your child.'

Davis gives all his spare time to charitable endeavours on behalf of Peterborough's Special Care Baby Unit, to buy more ventilators and equipment. In the ways that really count, he is a giant.

■ ROGER Lewis is the author of *Seasonal Suicide Notes*, available in paperback from Short Books.